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THE IRISH LITERARY REVIVAL.

THE recent four months' visit of Mr. William Butler Yeats to our country has brought the high ideals and beautiful accomplishment of "The Irish Literary Revival" before us with the appeal of the spoken word, even in this unoratorical day so much more intimate and searching than that of the printed page. For twelve years now, since the beginning of the propaganda of the Irish Literary Society, London, in 1892, there has been much discussion of "The Irish Literary Revival" and of "The Neo-Celtic Renaissance," as some critics have called the literary activity in Ireland and in Ireland's fellow-Celtic countries, the Highlands of Scotland, the Isle of Man, Wales, Brittany, and Cornwall. In this discussion, there has been no little logrolling, a large share of loose speaking, absurd overpraise, and contemptuous depreciation come of racial prejudice, a number of beautiful and true appreciations of individual poets, both by men in the movement and men without, and several earnest attempts on the part of the workers within the movement to realize its significance. I would make an attempt to put the significance to English literature of the lesser movement, "The Irish Literary Revival."

Irish writers have contributed what is most important to English literature of the accomplishment of the so-called Neo-Celtic Renaissance. Of this contribution Mr. Yeats has told America eloquently in his lectures, "The Intellectual Revival in Ireland," "Poetry in the Old Time and in the New," and "The Drama: What It Is and What It Might Be;" but in none of these did he claim that the movement had yet contributed any great masterpiece to English literature. He declared his belief that the movement was strong in that it was based on national feeling, as was the movement in Norway that gave Ibsen and Björnson to the world; he believed that the movement had strength in that it was founded, to a certain degree, on folk song and folk story; and he hoped that it would continue to

have, as he believed it had now, something of the simplicity and earnestness of mediæval art. These are the modest claims for "The Irish Literary Revival" by the member whom critics are agreed in considering its greatest writer. The movement can surely claim more than this. It seems to me that in two of the great literary forms Irishmen and Irishwomen have attained results that compare favorably with those of the strongest contemporary English writers. High poetry and noble drama with national spirit have been written by several Irish writers that have come into prominence since the death of Tennyson, in 1892. In the essay and the novel young Irish writers have attained success; but their successes have not been so notable as in poetry and in drama, and but few of the more notable essays and but very few of the more notable novels have the national quality. In the humbler forms of the novel, however, the folk tale and the short story are bits out of Ireland's heart, and in the lesser literary form of the legendary history Mr. Standish O'Grady and Lady Augusta Gregory have almost no English competitors. In Mr. Standish O'Grady's "The Heroic Period" (1878) and "Cuchulain and His Contemporaries" (1880) the writers of "The Irish Literary Revival" found the material for their reshapings of old legend into poetry and drama, and in Lady Gregory's "Cuchulain of Muirthemne" and "Gods and Fighting Men" these legends have been given artistic form of such distinction that the two books bid fair to take rank with the "Morte D'Arthur" and the "Mabinogion."

The Irish poets of high account seem to me to be Mr. Yeats, Mr. G. W. Russell, and Lionel Johnson; the Irish dramatists of high account, Mr. Yeats and Mr. Edward Martyn; the Irish novelist of high account, Mr. George Moore; and the Irish essayists of high account, Mr. Yeats, Mr. Russell, and Lionel Johnson. Lionel Johnson's great work in the essay was his "Art of Thomas Hardy," and there is in that but little to suggest that he is an Irishman, but he wrote many papers on Irish matters—it is a pity of pities they are not collected—and these entitle him to a place as an Irish essayist.

How far the work of these writers is the result, direct or indi-

rect, of the various organizations that for the past twenty years or less have been striving to encourage an Anglo-Irish literature it would be a very difficult matter to determine—certainly there is not the space here to discuss the question. Nor could I, had I the knowledge, concern myself here with the question of the literature in Irish created under the encouragement of the Gaelic League since its foundation in 1893. I know no Irish, and cannot speak at first-hand; but I have nowhere seen it claimed by those that know contemporary literature in Irish that the verses of Dr. Hyde or his plays or the plays of Father O'Leary or Father Dideen compare in literary quality with the poetry and plays of the writers in English whom I have named above. Some of the folk songs current to-day are of great beauty even in translation; they are said to be of far greater beauty in the original Gaelic.

What I am concerned with is, What contribution has "The Irish Literary Revival" made to English literature, which to me is English literature if written in English, be the country of its composition any of the British Isles or India or South Africa or America?

We speak very loosely when we say "The Irish Literary Revival," for the movement we are discussing is not a revival at all, but chiefly the reawakening of interest in a subject-matter whose discovery by the English poets in the eighteenth century was one of the chief agents in bringing about what we know as the Romantic movement in Georgian England. Gray and Collins were interested in Celtic subject-matter, if they had not the Celtic spirit, before Macpherson adapted and created his world-awakening versions of old Gaelic legend. Ossianic societies kept alive the discussion of Gaelic legend until the day of Tom Moore, who might have been so much greater a poet had he paid more heed to his country's thought. From Moore's day to Mangan's no poet of power stood for Ireland as Ferguson and Aubrey De Vere and Allingham did from Mangan's day to our day. "The Poets of the Nation," Thomas Davis at their head, were doubtless better known in Ireland than Mangan, who published only one book of verse—and that "*Anthologia Germanica*" (1845)—in his lifetime; but their

models were, as Mr. Yeats has said, "English masters and half-masters," Scott and Byron and Macaulay, and their nationality was in the sentiments they expressed in their verse, not in its quality. Almost contemporaneously with these "Poets of the Nation" came the publication of Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the "Mabinogion," in which she revealed beautiful old Cymric legends far more beautifully than any translator revealed Gaelic stories, though Crofton Croker's "Fairy Tales and Legends" had in it much of Celtic Ireland, far more than the Irish novelist from Miss Edgeworth to Lever.

No consideration of the contemporary movement would be true that failed to realize the influence of James Mangan, Sir Samuel Ferguson, Aubrey De Vere, and William Allingham on Mr. Yeats, Mr. Russell, and their fellow-poets. Mangan is of course the most considerable poet of the four, and though he lived apart from the world, and his verse did not become a power for some years after his death, and though his art is seldom perfect, there are poems of his that hold their own in memory against the poems of the great English poets. Never in his day like Davis, a poet of his people, he gradually made his way to their hearts. I have by me as I write a version of his "Dark Rosaleen," taken down forty years ago in New Jersey from oral dictation of an old Irishman who had the rhythm and thought of its seven long stanzas ever in mind if he did not have them quite by heart. Sir Samuel Ferguson has left us several stirring ballads and descriptive passages in his poems of epic intention that have truly the "large accent" that Matthew Arnold found in Homer. But he was even farther than Mangan from being the sure artist. Allingham needs no praise, since Tennyson and Rossetti have praised him, but it should be recalled that many of those little lyrics of his that sing themselves into the memory at first reading are inspired by Irish folk songs. Aubrey De Vere, by inheritance and temperament a Wordsworthian, often turned his attention to Ireland; but his interest centered rather in his country's Church than in his country's nationality, and, high poems as are certain of his poems, few of them have real national quality.

From these men the leading Irish poets of to-day inherit,

but they have studied the great English poets for the technique of their high craft and sometimes for further inspiration. Mr. Yeats has gone to Blake and to Shelley and to the Pre-Raphaelites as surely as he has gone to Ferguson and Allingham; Mr. Russell has followed masters so differing as William Morris and Emerson, and the sacred books of the East and Irish mythology have wrapt him out of himself; and poor Lionel Johnson knew the work of all the men whose names are the great roll call of the English poets, caring greatly for all, but perhaps most for the seventeenth century rhapsodists and for Wordsworth. Toward the end of his life he was drawing nearer and nearer to Ireland, the home of his ancestry for many years. These younger men began with the high intention of carrying to artistic realization the ideals of a great Irish literature in English that actuated their great predecessors. They had worked independently; the young men would work together. The young men were not faithful from the start to national subjects, but into whatever strange ways they strayed their country eventually called them back to her. In Dublin one of the first organizations to encourage serious artistic intention was a club that professedly met for religious and philosophical discussion. This was the Hermetic Society, in which Mr. Russell was the power, and which has given Ireland another writer, that subtle critic who calls himself "John Eglinton." Mr. Yeats, too, often was of their meetings. In 1883 "The Southwark Irish Literary Club," in London, began an organization that eventually attracted to it Mr. Yeats. Mr. Yeats was instrumental in developing "The Southwark Literary Club" into "The Irish Literary Society, London." In 1892 Mr. Yeats was active in the formation of the National Literary Society in Dublin, where there had been previously an active "Celtic Literary Society," and in 1899 he, with Mr. George Moore and Mr. Edward Martyn, organized "The Irish Literary Theater." In 1901 "The Irish Literary Theater" was succeeded by "The Irish National Theatrical Company" and out of this developed "The Irish National Theater Society," of which Mr. Yeats is now president. This organization has just (June) acquired its own playhouse in Dublin. It will be seen, then, that if the suc-

cess of the movement has come in any measure through organization Mr. Yeats is surely to be credited with much of such success.

Mr. Yeats has said that it was the fall of Parnell, in 1890, that turned the attention of intellectual Ireland from politics to letters, and made possible the revival that we are now witnessing. That may be, for most of the organizations above referred to were either formed after 1890 or became influential after that date, but the first book of importance in this revival was published over a year earlier, Mr. Yeats's "Wanderings of Oisín" (1888). None of Mr. Russell's verses were published until "Homeward," in 1894, although its verses were circulated in Dublin in manuscript some five years before that. Lady Gregory did not publish anything of real importance to the movement until her "Cuchulain" of 1902. Mr. Edward Martyn's "Heatherfield" was published in 1899, but no book of Mr. Moore's can be called the direct outcome of the movement until his "Untilled Field" of 1903, although he draws from the leaders of the movement for his characters in earlier stories. With the exception of Mr. Yeats and Dr. Hyde the *littérateurs* that the world knows best as members of the movement did not definitely associate themselves with the movement, in the estimation of the public, until after it was well under way. Mr. G. W. Russell, however, was known personally to many of the young men working for the revival almost from its very start, although his dominant interest has been always, as now, not so much in its national as in its spiritual quality.

In 1894 it was suggested that drama would come of the movement by the performance of a play of Mr. Yeats's, "The Land of Heart's Desire," at the Avenue Theater, London. In this same year came also the publication of Mr. Russell's verses in "Homeward" and of Miss Nora Hopper's "Ballads in Prose," and the newspaper discussion that followed these made more familiar the scope and purpose of the movement that had been outlined in the lectures by the Rev. Stopford Brooke, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr. George Sigerson, and Dr. Douglas Hyde before "The Irish Literary Society, London," and "The National Literary Society, Dublin," in 1892 and 1893,

and finally printed after much contemporaneous newspaper comment.

The greatest work of this contemporary movement has been done in poetry. The themes of this poetry are the old Gaelic legends, which are adapted and retold in English, largely after the manner of the Pre-Raphaelite poets; folk songs, on which are built or from which are developed lyrics, also largely in the manner of the Pre-Raphaelites, although the material here preserves a simplicity the Pre-Raphaelites never attained; the moods of modern Irishmen, brought about by their experience of the great passions, by the great wrongs of their country, and by the great beauties of their country; descriptions of Irish scenery—seacoast and mountains and bog land; and politics. It is needless to say that political feeling has led to but little verse that is poetry, perhaps only in some of the verses of "Ethna Carberry" and Miss Alice Milligan. The forms in which the younger Irish poets write are largely those of the English poetry of the time of Tennyson and Browning and—as I said—the Pre-Raphaelites, and the manner and accent of the poems have, I think, more of the Pre-Raphaelite quality than of any other.

The poetry on the whole, however, has very great differences from the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites in its great spirituality. The revolt against materialism, as distinctive of many of the contemporary Irish writers as of Maeterlinck, is probably due to a cause similar in their case and in his. In those days when Maeterlinck was taking Emerson to heart in Ghent, Mr. G. W. Russell and the men grouped around him were taking Emerson to heart in Dublin. The most mystic of these Irish poets are Mr. Russell and Mr. Charles Weekes. Mr. Yeats's symbolism, so often popularly associated with their mysticism, if due to any master, is due to his study of Blake. But these poets I have mentioned are but a few of the many that are singing "to lighten Ireland's wrong." Alongside of the verse of Mr. Yeats and Mr. Russell and Lionel Johnson, than which has been written none finer in English by men of their years, is that of Miss Dora Sigerson (Mrs. Clement K. Shorter), who, among many undistinguished verses, has written lyrics with

deep heart's cry and ballads of grim power; of Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson, whose lyrics of the little things of out of doors have the tender colors of Irish landscape; of "Moira O'Neill," whose "Songs of the Glens of Antrim," "Kindly Irish of the Irish," if ever poems were, have a singing quality rare in contemporary verse; of "Ethna Carberry" (Mrs. Seumas McManus), whose death two years ago cut off a poetical power that was passing out of promise into achievement, who had indeed reached achievement in one or two nature poems and in her keen for "The Passing of the Gael;" of Mr. Herbert Trench, whose "Deirdre Wed" is a fine rendering of Ireland's greatest story of old time; of Miss Emily Lawless, the charm of whose journeys among the western islands has entered into her poems, many of which express the lament of Jacobite exiles for Galway and Mayo: and of Miss Nora Hopper (Mrs. Chesson), who, although it is said she knows little of Ireland at first-hand, has caught the accents of its winds and waters in many a lyric that cannot be forgotten. Miss Hopper has at times, indeed, a music and passion that carry her to a place among the greater singers. None of these poets that I have mentioned are mere versifiers; the work of some has a rare and delicate beauty, the work of others has the accent of great poetry.

Magical phrase and imaginative power are more constant to the verse of Mr. Yeats and Mr. Russell and Lionel Johnson than to the verse of these lesser poets. These three are preoccupied by the things of the spirit, yet their senses are keen toward certain things of the earth. Mr. Yeats's verse is, however, more often drenched with dream than dew. The call of much-loved earthly things is strong in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," but that is an early poem, and even this call finds him in half dream on the London pavements. He is most often possessed with dream. His characteristic poems are conceived in dreams, their colors are the colors of dreams, their music is the music of dreams. Mr. Russell's verses are even less substantial than Mr. Yeats's. It is the spirit yearning for release from the flesh that informs them. His "Homeward: Songs by the Way" are sung on the road through these strange human lands to the

home that is after death, many of them when are granted to him glimpses of this home as he walks in trance or waking dream. The music of his verse is more disembodied, if it is less sweet, than the music of Mr. Yeats. Lionel Johnson's feet were planted more firmly on the earth that he has left. His poems bring back to me the cloisters of mediæval Catholicism; when I think of him I think of Winchester and Oxford in the England of his family's adoption and of the abbeys of Muckross and Sligo in his ancestral land. When I think of Mr. Russell, I think of the asceticism of the Christian hermits of early Ireland in remote places by holy wells and on holy mountains—such visions come to him as came to them. When I think of Mr. Yeats, I think of Druids celebrating their rites at twilight or in moonlight in lonely temples, but always there are near beautiful queens and great kings of Ireland's heroic age.

So much for contemporary poetry in Ireland. In the drama it is again Mr. Yeats that must be mentioned first. His plays are all beautiful in conception and all adapted to successful presentation on the stage, if not to the entire dramatic success. His "*Kathleen-ni-Hoolihan*," which symbolizes Ireland and the heroic sacrifices of her children, and Mr. Martyn's "*Heatherfield*," which tells the story of a young Irish landlord whose dream of making wild mountainside into grass field results in his going mad, vie with each other for the place of honor among the dramatic successes. Mr. Martyn's "*Heatherfield*" has been played very successfully a number of times, his "*Maeve*" with some success a few times, and his "*Tale of a Town*," in Mr. Moore's and Mr. Yeats's adaption of it into "*The Bending of the Bough*," a few times. Other plays that have been successfully performed are Mr. George Moore's and Mr. Yeats's "*Diarmid and Grania*," which was played four times by Mr. Benson's company in Dublin, in "*The Irish Literary Theater*," 1901; Mr. Russell's "*Deirdre*," a beautiful picture of Ireland's old days, which was presented a number of times and very successfully by "*The Irish National Theatrical Company*;" Lady Gregory's "*The Losing Game*," a simple and feeling dramatic transcript from Irish peasant life; Mr. James H. Cousin's "*The Racing Lug*," a story of the fisher

life of the northeastern coast, "The Sword of Dermot," of Ireland's mediæval wars, "A Man's Foes," an episode from modern life, and "Connla," a dream about the son of the famous mythological chieftain Conn of the Hundred Battles; Mr. J. M. Synge's¹ "In a Wicklow Glen," a bitter sketch of the loveless marriages of the Irish peasants, and "Riders to the Sea," a tragic day in the gray life of the Aran fisher folk; Mr. F. Ryan's "The Laying of the Foundations," "The Pillars of Society" of Ireland's dramatic movement; Mr. Patric Mac Cormac Colm's "A Saxon Shillin'" and "Broken Soil," respectively a tract against recruiting and a study of Irish peasant life on the bog lands of Mid-Ireland.

The greatest contemporary English novelist, an Irishman, Mr. George Moore, has not chosen until recently to concern himself deeply with his country, and his fellow Irish novelists and short story writers, charming as many of them are and powerful as are one or two of them, cannot compare with Scotchmen and Englishmen of the same generation. When we think of Irish novelists, we think of "Rosa Mulholland," Miss Emily Lawless, Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson, Miss Barlow, Rev. Dr. Sheehan, Mr. Seumas McManus, Mr. Shan F. Bullock, Mr. Stephen Gwynn, and Mr. William Buckley. These few Irish novelists have made a definite contribution to English literature, but not so important a contribution, I think, as their predecessors from Carleton to Kickham and not nearly so important a contribution as contemporary Scotch and English novelists.

In Mr. Yeats Ireland has an admirable essayist, and in Mr. Russell and "John Eglinton" and Lionel Johnson literary critics that have at times strayed into the more genial or uplifting regions of familiar essay or philosophical essay. These men, like the few Irish novelists, have made contributions of recognized value to English literature, but their work is slight compared to that of the Englishmen writing at the same time.

The Irishmen fare better when we compare their drama and

¹A play of Mr. Synge's will open the new playhouse of "The Irish National Theater Society" in Dublin this fall.

poetry with the English. I have purposely left Americans out of consideration. The two wittiest English dramatists of our day are Irishmen. Neither Oscar Wilde nor Mr. Bernard Shaw has chosen to be a national dramatist as Mr. Yeats and Mr. Martyn have chosen, but Irishmen may well claim that they have written most of the few plays of our day that are at once literature and successful stage pieces. The other successful English contemporary playwrights that may be taken seriously are Mr. Barrie, Mr. Pinero, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, and Mr. Stephen Phillips.

Not one of the contemporary Irish national dramatists has as yet spoken to an audience at all comparable in size with the audiences Mr. Jones and Mr. Pinero and Mr. Phillips and Mr. Barrie speak to. But "The Heatherfield" as literature and the plays of Mr. Yeats as literature, and "The Heatherfield" as drama and "Kathleen-ni-Hoolihan" as drama, seem to me to approach as nearly to great drama as any of the plays of the English playwrights I have mentioned. All in all, in prose and in verse, I think, "The Irish Literary Theater," "The Irish National Theater Society," "The Cumann-na-Gaedhal Irish Theater Company"² have produced as much drama that is literature as the English stage for the past ten years—and this largely with amateur actors. The plays of Mr. Yeats alone make a list whose naming brings a realization of the possibilities for drama in the changing moods of Irish life: "The Countess Kathleen," "The Land of Heart's Desire," "The Shadowy Waters," "On Baile's Strand," "The Hourglass," "A Pot of Broth," "The King's Threshold," and "Where There Is Nothing."

In other forms of poetry than the dramatic I think Ireland has given English literature during the past fifteen years as high poems as any by the English poets younger than Mr. Meredith and Mr. Swinburne. The more considerable English poets of the younger generation are Mr. Robert Bridges, Mr. William Watson, Mr. A. C. Benson, Mr. Stephen Phillips, and

²A company partly made up of this organization presented Irish dramas for a few days during the summer at the St. Louis Exposition.

Mr. Laurence Binyon, who may be grouped as "The Wordsworthians," though Mr. Phillips and Mr. Binyon sometimes stray to other masters than Wordsworth; Mr. Francis Thompson and Mr. Laurence Housman, rhapsodists in the following of Coventry Patmore's later manner; W. E. Henley, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, and Mr. Henry Newbolt, the Poets of Empire; and Mr. Arthur Symons, the "Decadent" Mr. F. Sturge Moore, Mr. A. E. Housman, and Mr. John Davidson, differing too greatly from any of the above groups to be associated with them, and differing as greatly from each other. Mr. Yeats, in a little essay on Lionel Johnson, has written of five of these fourteen English poets I have named in these words: "Contemporary English poets are interested in the glory of the world, like Mr. Rudyard Kipling; or in the order of the world, like Mr. William Watson; or in the passion of the world, like Mr. John Davidson; or in the pleasure of the world, like Mr. Arthur Symons. Mr. Francis Thompson . . . is alone preoccupied with a spiritual life." If it is not misleading to sum up a poet in a phrase, it might be said, continuing Mr. Yeats's fashion of speech, that contemporary Irish poets are interested in the dreaming of the world, like Mr. William Butler Yeats; or in the spirituality of the world, like Mr. George W. Russell, or in the religion of the world, like Lionel Johnson. To all three, the Otherworld has been as near as this world; it is in the keenness of their realization of the Otherworld, and of Ireland, whose purple mountains and brown bogs and gray shores white with foam are the threshold of the Otherworld, and of Ireland's people ever crossing and recrossing this threshold in dream that is as vivid as actuality—it is in the keenness of their realization and in the clarity of their interpretation of beauty that ever hovers on the border of the unseen that they have enriched English literature.

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